

CURRICULUM OUTLINE FOR POSTGRADUATE QUALIFICATION PATHWAY FOR SOCIAL WORK WITH AUTISTIC PEOPLE

For social work educators



Department
of Health &
Social Care

Introduction

Social workers, alongside other staff in social care, health and other public bodies, will soon undertake mandatory autism training in England. However, social workers who work with, assess and commission for autistic people require additional, more specialist, knowledge and skills.

The curriculum outline described here builds on the mandatory autism training, by enabling social workers to gain a specialist post-qualifying award. It will ensure that this level of learning and attainment is recognised and valued as 'specialist' - over and beyond that required for initial qualification as social workers.

Social work educators are encouraged to adapt and use this module in their post-qualifying (PQ) programmes.

The post-graduate pathway applies to most social workers in direct practice and can be a standalone qualification or form the foundation of a postgraduate diploma or masters. The postgraduate qualifications will be accredited by the university but have been designed to be blended programmes, which can be accessed, using a portfolio model, via a distance learning approach within the practice environment.

The delivery approach utilises models delivered by other professions (e.g. education) and develops a specific social work with autistic people curriculum. It also draws on existing autism related courses and resources used for social work CPD across a range of local authorities.

This course outline should be read in conjunction with BASW's *Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Pathway for social work with autistic adults*.

Background

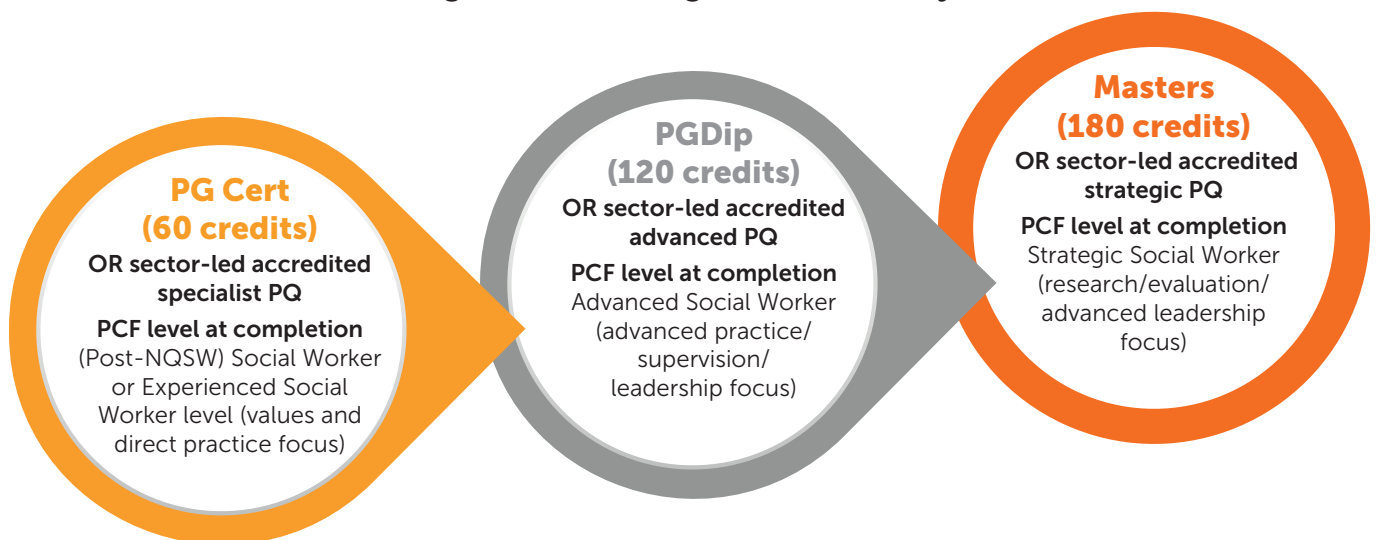
BASW's CPD Pathway is an innovative and practice-focused post-qualification training framework. It is underpinned by principles of co-production and has been developed through collaboration between autistic people, professionals and those who are members of both groups. Moving beyond the involvement of autistic people, to genuine collaboration and recognition of autistic expertise, this project has benefited from extensive guidance and input from autistic adults and advisers, Sylvia Stanway, Ben Vickers and Dr Yo Dunn, a professional trainer who is autistic, and has broad expertise in both autism and social care.

The CPD Pathway builds on the [Capabilities Statement for Social Work with Autistic Adults](#), which outlines the knowledge, skills and values required in this area of social work. The domains of learning, training, and development within the CPD Pathway are drawn from the [Professional Capabilities Framework \(PCF\)](#) and are consistent with the [Knowledge and Skills Statement for Social Workers in Adult Services](#). The CPD Pathway

has also been designed to align with the [Department of Health and Social Care's Core Capabilities Framework for Supporting Autistic People](#). A separate [mapping document](#) sits alongside this document.

The diagram below explains the 'scaffolding approach' envisaged with these CPD Pathways. Progression is mapped onto a conventional academic pathway such as PG Cert, PGDip, or Master's. These pathways could also be pursued through a sector or professional body-led accreditation route, with or without formal academic credits. This is in recognition that CPD needs to be available to all, flexibly and affordably, but also needs to meet agreed quality standards, which are usually assured through higher education institutions. However, although the model proposed here is structured on a university qualification framework for quality assurance purposes, other options and models, including sector-wide accreditation, may also apply.

Figure 1: The Postgraduate Pathway



The blended model

All social workers in both the public and private sector are required to undertake CPD as part of their work. Examples of such activity include: attending courses, conferences and workshops; undertaking one-to-one coaching; and pursuing online and distance learning.

This sector-led specialist PQ pathway provides a staged approach to skills development where practitioners use their practice experience, consolidated with theory and academic input, to develop their skills. This pathway has been designed for practitioners who specialise in working with autistic people or work with autistic people in more general childcare and adult care services or have a special interest in working with autistic people. It could also be extended to other health, social care and public sector professions such as health professionals working in integrated teams with social care (e.g. mental health), probation officers and registered managers of care services specialising in autism.

This curriculum has been mapped with the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) which is the profession-owned, overarching framework of social work education and professional development in England and the Knowledge and Skills Statement (KSS) for social work with adults which sets out what is expected of qualified social workers in the adult practice settings. The staged approach

aligns with the 'tiered' model used in the DHSC Capabilities Framework which the outline is also mapped against (see [mapping document](#)).

The pathway has been designed with a specific focus on social work but there is overlap with other professional groups and it is easily adaptable. Through this work, there is an aim to build a body of knowledge for social work with autistic people which is professionally defined, developed and owned, co-produced with autistic people and which has a core set of concepts, practice knowledge and literature/research knowledge.

This work will be supported BASW's Special Interest Group on social work with autistic people which aims to influence policy, promote effective practice and support career development.

The sector-led specialist PG Certificate will be:

- 60 credits formed of 3 x 20-credit modules linked with the PG Diploma and master's awards.
- Online and offered as a national course lasting between 6-12 months.
- Either a single credit or portfolio route.
- Able to provide blended learning opportunities – online teaching (including immersive technology), reflection, lectures, tutor support etc.

Portfolio route

Credits	Module title	Formative task	Summative assignment	Assignment length/words	Assessment
20	Module 1: Understanding autism	500	Learning proposal and knowledge assignment	2000	Graded – pass 50
20	Module 2: Practice context	500	Reflective portfolio	8000	Pass/fail
20	Module 3: Student/role focussed module	500	Summative assignment	2000	Graded – pass 50

Curriculum outline

The curriculum outlined here is an example of what can be developed.

The views of employers, practitioners and people with lived experience of social work should be incorporated into the design, ongoing development and review of the curriculum.

Module 1: Understanding autism

A foundational module to capture and develop learning and knowledge about autism and autistic people. This module could utilise teaching and knowledge from other multi-professional autism study courses.

This module focuses on:

- **Developing and expanding knowledge of autism:** respectful terminology, neuro-developmental basis and lifelong condition, varied presentation and uniqueness of individuals. Also, gaining relevant knowledge from research including co-existing conditions and health inequalities.
- **Building on knowledge from mandatory training:** focusing on reasonable adjustments and adaptations in the contexts of social work and of care and support services. Building knowledge of the practical implications of autism in daily living, needs for care and support, challenges, difficulties and strengths.
- **Social work perspective and familiarity with BASW Capabilities Statement:** including supporting autistic decision making, strength-based and co-production with autistic people.
- **Evidence and policy in social work with autistic people:** including crisis prevention, promoting rights and autonomy, tackling health inequalities, supporting parenting.
- **How and where autism fits within general social work and social care:** children and families, adult care, care managers, prison social work, probation officers, managers working in social care etc.

Module 2: Practice context

This module covers working with autistic people and their families/supporters in the contexts of the legal frameworks of social care (e.g. Care Act) which guide practice on assessment and intervention.

This module focuses on health and social care as well as safeguarding. It also looks at practice models and theories in as far as they are relevant to and/or challenged by working with autistic people, emphasising strengths and relationship-based approaches including how these principles can be realised effectively with autistic people.

This module focuses on:

- **Skill development in accessible practice with autistic people:** including flexible adaptations to communication, making reasonable adjustments to policies and practice.
- **Understanding and applying the law in work with autistic people:** autism-specific knowledge around the European Convention on Human Rights, Children and Families Act, Children Act, Mental Capacity Act, Mental Health Act, Care Act and the Equality Act.
- **Specialist social work with autistic people:** social care, undertaking and adapting different types of assessments with autistic people (e.g. Care Act, Child in Need, Mental Capacity), parenting capacity with a focus on autism-specific issues and adaptations relevant to these.
- **Safeguarding autistic people:** vulnerabilities and risks, preventative work, assessing, managing and reducing risk, building resilience.

Module 3: Student/role-focussed module

The focus in this module is agreed between student and tutor to look at the student's practice context and/ or their area of interest. It is best to consider this module as a reflective, research-based module.

This module would allow for a multi-professional approach including social work contexts as well as other social and health care professionals, such as probation officers, staff working in different care settings etc.

Developed in partnership:

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